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Attesting to the issue of globalization, taken up below, some of this book was actually written on a series of electronic mail networks. I began a fairly intense e-mail correspondence with John Walbridge about my discoveries of Baha'i contacts with the Young Ottomans in 1988. These discussions continued on a small e-mail group called, playfully, *Majnun*, in the early 1990s, that included some of the scholars thanked above. But the bulk of the book was written interactively on a later series of larger, more public e-mail forums called: *Talisman@indiana.edu* (1994–1996, now defunct), *Talisman@umich.edu* (still operating in fall 1997), *Irfan@umich.edu*, and, finally, a list that forms part of the H-Net consortium (<http://h-net.msu.edu/>) at Michigan State University: *H-Bahai@h-net.msu.edu* (subscriptions through [listserv@h-net.msu.edu](mailto:listserv@h-net.msu.edu)). I presented paragraphs, or arguments, and received interactive comments from prospective readers throughout the world! I also received comments from drafts and translations posted at Web sites, <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/bahai.htm> and <http://h-net2.msu.edu/~bahai/>. I am deeply grateful to my many interlocutors on these Internet lists and on the World Wide Web and hope that I have repaid their interrogations of my work with increased clarity and cogency.



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For the convenience of nonspecialists I have omitted many diacriticals, except for 'ayn and hamzah. The transliteration system employed for Ottoman Turkish is that of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*; in ambiguous cases I have preferred an orthography that retains the visual connection to Arabic words and so have not shown the hardened final dental (Abdülhamid, not Abdülhamit). Arabic and Persian have been transliterated according to the official Baha'i system (with only a few minor modifications, such as dropping most diacritics and putting the dash directly after the *tā' marbūṭah* when showing the Persian construct state), so as not to confuse that audience.

# Introduction

Modernity, like a prize fighter, has its proponents and detractors, observers who bet on it and against it. Some intellectuals, mired in dreams of old empires and authentic peasant ethnicity, have been nostalgic for premodern times. Others have declared modernity over with and insist that the world has entered a postmodern phase. Some have staunchly defended it as an ongoing progressive process. Modernity's admirers have given it an impressive résumé. French thinkers in particular tend to put modernity under the sign of reason. A prominent French sociologist sees the three central processes characteristic of modernity as the organization of a society governed by the rule of law, an individualism seeking self-interest and freedom from constraints, and, finally, more efficient production via science, technology, and administration. "What," he asks, "could provide a basis for this correspondence between a scientific culture, an ordered society, and free individuals, if not the triumph of *reason*?"<sup>1</sup> Modernity, which is generally held to date to the eighteenth century, is contrasted to what went before, which many authors describe as "feudalism," or "absolutism."

Premodern society in this view was characterized by divine-right monarchy and absolutist rule in the political sphere. The economic system was structured around special perquisites for certain estates that one could only enter by being born into them (such as the nobility) or through a long apprenticeship and conformity to group rules (guilds, the clergy of the state-backed Established Church). Free inquiry was curbed or impeded by a regime of censorship and by the sway of scholastic religion. The American and then French Revolutions were seen by propo-



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nents of modernity to have liberated human beings from royal despotism by establishing representative governments. The expansion of the market and the advent of the Industrial Revolution, they said, led to a more dynamic economic system in which the corporate privileges of the nobility, clergy, and guilds were abolished and individual merit was rewarded. The complex of the eighteenth-century political revolutions and the Industrial Revolution (1760–1840) has been referred to as the “dual revolution.”<sup>2</sup> The separation of religion and state and the promulgation of religious liberty and freedom of conscience in the U.S. Bill of Rights and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man removed the tyranny of religion over minds and opened the way for wide-ranging scientific and social inquiry. Formal state censorship was abolished and a relatively free civil society emerged, a public sphere outside the state, consisting of newspapers, stage plays, salons, and coffeehouses, where public opinion could be formed.<sup>3</sup> With the decline of royal authority, which had held together polyglot empires and principalities, a new form of political organization was imagined into being, the nation-state, based upon territory and upon the positing of a “people” with a set of common characteristics (such as language, “race,” or religion). Expanding labor markets and universal education raised the question of women’s rights in society. Essential to the project of modernity, though little discussed by its celebrators, was the modern bureaucracy that could administer the newly created nation (as Weber recognized).

This narrative of the liberation of humankind from the clutches of absolutism has not gone unchallenged. Some have concentrated upon the manner in which modernity bestowed upon the state and other large social institutions new powers to monitor, discipline, and shape human beings, through the penitentiary, the hospital, the laboratory, the sanitarium.<sup>4</sup> It has been argued that Reason of State in the early modern period was identical to the notion of policing society, and that reason was identified with state coercion and control.<sup>5</sup> The awesome violence by which the modern nation-state is constituted, the regimentation of the individual by the modern bureaucracy and military, the establishment of colonialism, the exploitation of the worker in industrial capitalism, the subversion of democracy by big money, and the disenchantment of the world brought on by secularization have all figured in critiques of the phenomenon. Some of these themes were struck in the nineteenth century by Marx, others early in the twentieth century by the pessimistic German sociologist Max Weber.



Surely there have been many modernities rather than a single unified phenomenon. Still, *modernities* is an awkward word, and these various strands must be related in order for us to speak of them meaningfully under the same rubric, so why not employ a singular, overarching noun? What we recognize better now than ever before is how complex have been the processes associated with modernity or modernities, how developments in one sector, such as the economy, deeply affected developments elsewhere, such as in religion or politics, and vice versa. This book treats the interaction of religion and modernity, and underlines this reflexivity, since religion has often been crucially important to modern societies and has both been shaped by and helped shape modernity itself. Rather than attempt a global definition or evaluation of modernity, I wish in this book to come at the subject peripherally. I will argue from a set of case studies on the ground, in one corner of the world, rather than from a central, overarching ideal. My treatment is peripheral in the sense that my evidence comes not only from Europe but also from the nineteenth-century Middle East, a relatively much less studied region. I treat modernity in the context of the rise of a millenarian movement in Iran, the Baha'i faith (*Ā'īn-i Bahā'ī*), a story little enough known yet profoundly implicated in the advent of modernity that it may enable us to look upon the phenomenon with new eyes.

I concentrate here upon five themes that are both central to modernity and central to the Middle Eastern religious response to it. The first is the struggle over the relationship of religion to the state. The American and French revolutions, templates for the great political upheavals of modern times, both involved a repudiation of the idea of a state-imposed religion. The number of modern nation-states that continue to mandate a state religion is vanishingly small, though religion plays an important role in some forms of nationalism (e.g., the Irish, Polish, Bolivian, Swedish, and Egyptian). The disentanglement of religion and state has seldom been complete, and should be seen on a spectrum, rather than as an absolute value. Given the inescapable religious diversity of any human society, only a neutral stance toward religion allows the government to treat all citizens equally, something recognized by Luther, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau alike.<sup>6</sup> For

Machiavelli, the important thing is to free the state from the dominance of the Church. . . . This triumph of Reason of State . . . leads . . . from the theocracy of Geneva to the idea of popular sovereignty, to the modern conviction . . . that the rationalism of the state is the precondition for the freedom of citizens, and that individuals will flourish only if they take part in



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public life. On the other hand it can—and always does—lead to the absolute authority of a State.<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, whereas Hobbes and Locke thought of reason and revelation as coexisting principles, other modern thinkers such as Jefferson and Marx held reason in itself to be a sufficient basis for society and government.

Opposition to this key element of modernity, visible in many Vatican encyclicals and Muslim fatwas, must also be acknowledged, as must the justice of some religious critiques of the republican state as easily falling into authoritarianism, amorality, and the purely instrumental use of reason characteristic of capitalism and bureaucracy. As German sociologist Max Weber so clearly saw, “Rationalization makes the world orderly and reliable, but it cannot make the world meaningful.”<sup>8</sup> Weber referred to the way in which modern science and rational politics and economics led to a disenchantment of the world, which was no longer understood as a mysterious stage for magical correspondences or divine interventions but as a machine, the workings of which are amenable to rational understanding.

Still, anyone who contrasts the sort of religion-state relations that prevailed in the majority of countries in 1600 with those that exist today will easily discern that a sea change has occurred. The prospect of Japan persecuting Christians or of Germany waging a cultural struggle against Catholicism now seems remote. The disentanglement of state from religion is not the same as secularization, as both Poland and the United States demonstrate. Indeed, it has been argued by observers and social scientists since de Tocqueville that the end of a state monopoly on religion actually creates spaces for greater citizen participation in religious affairs. In eighteenth-century British North America, where there was an Established Church in each colony, only 17 percent of the population belonged to a church, in contrast with 68 percent in a United States with separation of religion and state at the end of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup>

The second grand theme of modernity that concerns me here has been a move away from political absolutism toward some form of democratic or representative government, a shift in the basis for the polity from divine-right monarchy to the sovereignty of the people. “The call for modernity is defined not so much by its opposition to traditional society as by its struggle against the absolute monarchy.”<sup>10</sup> For the British and North American political traditions such a shift further involves a displacement of power from the exercise of royal prerogative to the operation of a new sort of *reason* among the public.<sup>11</sup> The good decision is not good because of its source (in the divinely constituted monarchy) but because



of the process whereby it is arrived at, in the parliamentary reasoned debate of the people and their representatives. Whereas almost all polities in 1600 throughout the world were absolute monarchies of some sort, at the end of the twentieth century this form of rule is virtually extinct and what monarchies survive are almost entirely constitutional in nature. States based on reason tend to mix an emphasis on public contract (Rousseau, Marx) with an emphasis on private contract (Locke), but in practice one or the other emphasis often wins out, producing authoritarian states aiming at egalitarian community in the first case or states that support individualism (with all its attendant inequalities) on the other.<sup>12</sup>

The demand for representative government was not unrelated to the decisive demise of elements of the old feudal economic system that had survived into the age of early modern absolutism. The transition from economies largely based on agriculture and on mercantile capitalism to an industrial world order (with its own divisions of labor) created new social classes impatient with the symbolic power of unproductive kings, nobles, and clergy. Although the Middle East did not industrialize in any significant way in the nineteenth century, despite episodes such as the munitions factories of Cairo, the silk factories of Beirut, and the soap factories of Nablus, European industrialization did affect the region by creating a demand for cash crops such as cotton. Taxes on these commodities flowed into state coffers, rendering the government more powerful than before. The local landowning and mercantile elites, as well as artisans and elements of the peasantry, began to have powerful economic interests directly affected by the state, over the policies of which they increasingly wished to exert some control or at least influence. A population consisting largely of subsistence farmers or producers of a slight agricultural surplus might have been able to afford the luxury of absolutist rule, but the industrial world economy created a new situation, especially in Middle Eastern societies where the government tended to intervene heavily in the economy. In this region movements of economic protest, such as that mounted in 1892 by Iranian farmers and merchants against the state's licensing to a British investor of a monopoly on the marketing of Iranian tobacco, tended to be directed at the state and to overlap with movements for more democracy (see chapter 3 of this volume). British sociologist Anthony Giddens has located continuing movements for free speech and democratic politics in reactions against the growing power of the modern state, whatever its form. He argues that major developments in modernity (such as the rise of nation-states, of capitalism, of industrialized warfare, and of industry) tend to interact with society and with one another, producing



what he calls a “reflexivity” or a tendency for their effects to ricochet at increasing velocity. He terms populist responses to these developments forms of “utopian realism,” into which category he places movements for democracy.<sup>13</sup>

The third aspect of modernity is the rise of an international system of nation-states that are constituted by violence both within their borders and with their neighbors. A major concomitant of this national sovereignty is the world military order, based on the modern armed forces and their military technology.<sup>14</sup> While warfare has been a constant of human existence, the industrialization of war during the past two centuries has lent it a destructive potential, in terms of absolute numbers, that is new in history. The modern period saw the unprecedented conscription of hundreds of thousands of peasant civilians into the French army under Napoleon, the introduction of increasingly destructive artillery and ever more accurate handheld weapons, and the development of new forms of drills, military organization, and tactics. The advent of total war in the twentieth century led to the deaths of unprecedented millions of human beings in scores of deadly conflicts, some of them global in scope, and to the ultimate atrocities of Dachau on the one hand and of Hiroshima on the other. As noted above, peace movements may be seen as utopian idealist responses to this phenomenon of global state violence.<sup>15</sup>

I employ the hyphenated term *nation-state*. If the modern state is entangled with international violence on a vast scale, it is often underpinned by the phenomenon of nationalism, my fourth topic within modernity. The nation and the state are different phenomena. The state is the bureaucracy and the politicians who preside over it, and Weber saw clearly their increasing resort to instrumental rationality in dealing with the populace. On the other hand, the nation over which the state rules was imagined (in Benedict Anderson’s now famous phrase) into being in the late eighteenth century, first of all in Latin America, then in Europe, and finally in post-colonial societies. The illusion of national homogeneity and relatedness was fostered not only by state elites, in his view, but also by the printing press, by the novel, and by the newspaper, media that allowed individuals to identify with others on the basis of their invented “nation.”<sup>16</sup> Other theorists have protested the way in which Anderson tied the fashioning of modern nations to the literate middle and upper classes, but he clearly feels that it was a bourgeois project that gradually brought in the rest of the population. Alternative theories have attributed the formation of the nation to peasant struggles, to the transition from agrarian to industrial society, and to the policies of state actors themselves. Most theorists, how-



ever, agree that nationalism is a modern phenomenon, unlike, in its complete outline, the more limited forms of ethnic and cultural identity that preceded it.

Any nation can be rather easily deconstructed. French citizens speak Breton, Basque, German, and Arabic as well as French; the country has a Huguenot Protestant heritage as well as a Catholic one and is now 5 percent Muslim; citizens of many ethnic origins now come under the rubric “French,” including hundreds of thousands of Poles who immigrated as guest workers in the early twentieth century; substantial regional variations exist in economies and styles of life. The propensity of nationalist historians to create a “France” through history, threading together Charlemagne (who ruled over much of Western Europe and did not speak anything we could now recognize as “French”) with Joan of Arc and Napoleon (a Corsican!) is a simple parlor trick, a sleight of hand of identity politics writ large. All modern nations engage in this duplicity, with often amusing results, as Anderson points out. Thus, the Norman William the Conqueror ends up being a “British” ruler! The fashioning of nations depends not only upon the perception of similarities among the persons living on a particular territory and under a specific state but also upon a stress on the alienness of those who do not. Nationalism involves, in other words, the creation of an “Other,” and when nationalism becomes psychopathic the Other is demonized. Nation as distinct from state must be given more prominence in our understanding of the making of modernity. Utopian realist responses to the darker side of nationalism have recently included multiculturalism and world federalism.

Finally, I wish to treat the impact of modernity on patriarchy and conceptions of gender roles. Women’s movements and feminism are often overlooked in discussions of modernity, perhaps in part because they were not prominent in the genesis of Enlightenment rationality in the eighteenth century (though one should not forget the pioneering work of Mary Wollstonecraft in that era). Early modern absolutist societies were wedded to a thoroughgoing patriarchy, and if modernity is the attempt to supersede the legacy of absolutism, then the “woman movement” of the nineteenth century in places such as the United States is part and parcel of modernity. Feminism might be seen as a reflexive response to the articulation of Enlightenment freedoms, which were largely framed by thinkers such as Thomas Jefferson with white males in mind. A wave of nineteenth-century social movements, including the women’s movement, Abolitionism, and anticolonial parties, might best be characterized as inclusivist, as insisting that rights proffered the republic of white males by the Enlightenment be



extended to all human beings, regardless of sex or race or national origin. Such currents might thus be thought of as modernity's second wave. In other respects some feminist thought might best be understood not as an essential component of modernity, which has after all been highly patriarchal for most of the past two centuries, but as a utopian realist response to the heightening of gender distinctions characteristic of modern thought. It has been suggested that a liberal feminist demand for equal rights, while facing obstacles, can at least win grudging acceptance by male proponents of modernity, whereas the cultural-feminist demand for recognition of women as a corporate group and basis for identity politics has faced more opposition.<sup>17</sup>

Islam, even more than Roman Catholicism or the religious civilizations of India and East and Southeast Asia, has become a symbol for North Atlantic thinkers of antimodernism. Beginning in the eighteenth century, European Orientalist discourse constructed the Middle East as an object of knowledge that consisted in a set of oppositions with the West. The Orient was despotic, the West free; the Orient was stagnant, the West dynamic; the Orient was sensual and self-indulgent, the West ascetic and virile.<sup>18</sup> Those who view the Middle East as especially resistant to modernity can cite some evidence for this position. Some countries in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan, have rejected the notion of disentangling the civil state from religion, asserting that no distinction can be drawn between the two. Multiparty parliamentary democracy has not been a characteristic form of government in the region, though it has been more important than is usually realized. Freedom of speech, the press, and religion have been absent or far more circumscribed than has been common in the North Atlantic countries. Because of a heritage of gender segregation and norms of male honor invested in preserving the chastity of female kin (norms shared by the most conservative forms of Orthodox Judaism, by southern European Catholics and Orthodox, and by conservative Hinduism even outside the Middle East), the Middle East is among the more patriarchal set of societies in the world with regard to the public sphere. In other respects the Middle East gets bad press for having too successfully adopted the modern nation-state system, with its power hierarchies determined by warfare and with its tendency toward the imposition of homogeneous national ethnicities. The image of the Middle East as a site of warfare during the past two centuries is not completely without foundation, insofar as wars have actually occurred, some of them major (e.g., the Ottoman-Egyptian struggles of the 1830s, the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s). But a dispassionate review of



these wars and their centrality to state making would reveal that they are typical of the modern state system, not exceptions. The image of the Middle East as especially prone to a virulent nationalism appears to me to be in part an artifact of twentieth-century national liberation movements against colonialism and neocolonialism, since Westerners have found themselves the object of Middle Eastern nationalist critiques and so these have loomed large in their consciousness. Still, there seems no doubt that vehicles of Arab nationalism such as the Baath Party in Iraq have committed racist acts against the non-Arab Kurdish minority that can only be called genocidal. Israel's Zionism is likewise intertwined with racial and religious hierarchies, insofar as it insists on a state for and by Jews, leaving the one-fifth of its population that is ethnically Arab and religiously Christian or Muslim in a quandary as to where it fits in. Turkey's nationalism, centered on Turkish chauvinism, has often repressed the Kurds, while Iran's emphasis on Persian under the Pahlevis served to oppress Turkic-speaking Azeris and other linguistic minorities.

Yet to posit the Middle East or Islamic culture as intrinsically antimodern is to commit two fallacies of essentialism, implying somehow that modernity is a unified phenomenon and that there is a single, civilization-al Muslim or Middle Eastern response to it. Both propositions have been persuasively argued against.<sup>19</sup> Modernity, as shall be discussed below, is multidimensional and has a dark side. "The modern Middle East" is not a unified phenomenon with a single history; it has had many histories, only some of which have been told or represented by scholars. What really happened? Modernity came to the Middle East in the nineteenth century like a pent-up reservoir suddenly released. The intellectual, economic, and bureaucratic aspects of the phenomenon made the strongest impact at the beginning. In the space of decades intellectuals forsook Ptolemaic for Copernican astronomy and translated works of Voltaire and other Enlightenment figures, businessmen formed joint stock companies (not originally allowed in Islamic law), generals had their armies retrained in new drills and established munitions factories, regional patriotism intensified and prepared the way for nationalism, the population began growing exponentially under the impact of cash cropping and the new medicine, steamboats suddenly plied the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and agrarian capitalism and the advent of factories led to new kinds of class conflict. Great engineering works such as the Suez Canal and the Ottoman railroad lines linked the region internally and tied it more closely to the world economy. During the nineteenth century the external trade of Iran expanded twelve-fold, of the Ottoman Empire twenty-five-fold, and of Egypt fifty-fold.



Modernity came in telescoped form, so that the moveable type printing press (developed in Europe 1430–1450) and the telegraph (invented in 1844) arrived virtually together. Vesalius and Darwin also entered the discourse of intellectuals at the same time.

With regard to the separation of religion and state, many developments came later. In 1856 the Ottoman Empire made Christian and Jewish subjects legally equal to Muslims. From the 1920s Turkey instituted a thoroughgoing, Jacobin, French-style secularization. In so doing it probably separated civil law from local, religiously influenced custom more rigorously than most European countries, though it recently has moderated its Jacobinism, accommodating an Islamic party in the same way that Germany accommodates Christian Democrats. In many other Middle Eastern states religious courts have been abolished or relegated to personal status matters, while most law has been rationalized and put in the hands of civil judges. Compared to the Ottoman practice, there actually has been a large degree of separation of religion and state in some Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq, Tunisia, Algeria, and the Yemen, while theocratic states (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan) clearly form a small minority in the region. Within each of these countries a lively contest for power is being fought out between secularists and theocrats, among others, so that one cannot speak of an undifferentiated culture—a myth at which nationalists, ruling classes, and some scholars have connived.<sup>20</sup> The picture is mixed and ambiguous, and a comparison to the United States of the 1820s or the France of the 1830s, or even to twentieth-century England, Spain, and Italy (none of which can be excluded from modernity), might be more instructive than a comparison to contemporary practices in the United States. Nor are the significant movements toward increasing the entanglement of religion with the state in the Middle East without their parallels in the United States or in India.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century one begins seeing significant movements for parliamentary governance and more freedom of conscience and inquiry. The first of these is the first Ottoman constitutional movement of 1876–1878, followed by Egypt's 'Urabi Revolution in 1881–1882. Both of these failed, and both failed in some degree because of foreign intervention (the Russians went to war against the Ottomans, the British invaded Egypt and stopped the constitutionalists). In 1905–1911 Iranians launched a constitutional revolution, with the goal of gaining parliamentary governance and placing constraints on royal absolutism, but it resulted in a weak government exploited by the imperial powers and its order was overthrown by the dictatorial Pahlevi dynasty from 1926. The



second Ottoman constitutionalist movement, spearheaded by the Young Turks, succeeded in 1908, but was followed by military-bureaucratic dictatorship only a few years later, first instituted by the military wing of the Young Turks themselves, then by Ataturk. Egypt had a constitutional and parliamentary regime after independence from England, 1922–1952, but it was dominated by a small class of very large landlords. Other postcolonial Arab societies had similar “liberal” governments for a while, but in the 1950s these tended to be replaced with military-bureaucratic dictatorships. From the late 1940s Turkey and Pakistan turned toward multiparty democracy and, despite stretches of military rule, have consistently come back to that form of polity. Turkey and Pakistan are, along with Israel, the only approximations to genuine democracy in the Middle East in the 1990s, where the prime minister can actually lose an election. Because Turkey and Pakistan have a combined population as of this writing of about 190 million, however, and given the small populations of many Middle Eastern states, their experiences with parliamentary democracy have affected a large plurality of the region’s inhabitants.

With regard to the nation-state system, the Middle East has been no different than any other region of the world. Although it has been the scene of numerous wars, many of these have been launched by European powers (Russia, Italy, Germany, and England) or, if entirely indigenous, have frequently been of short duration and characterized by relatively few casualties. The major exception here was the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. Certainly, European wars dwarf Middle Eastern ones in the number of human beings they have killed in the twentieth century. This greater European-led slaughter indicates not that Europeans are more bloodthirsty than Middle Easterners but that they industrialized warfare long before the latter did, making it a far more efficient system of mass killing. Southeast Asia has seen far more state-led violence in the twentieth century than has the Middle East, insofar as it was the scene of Japanese atrocities during World War II, of the genocide against a million and a half leftists in Indonesia in the mid-1960s, and of the Cambodian genocide against urbanites and intellectuals, which killed one million out of a population of six million. (The number of Iraqi Kurds killed can only be numbered in the thousands, and the Lebanese civil war killed only tens of thousands, not millions). Nor is Middle Eastern nationalism in its procedures or forms obviously different from that which exists anywhere else in the world.

As for gender issues, the common perception in the outside world of Muslim societies is one of a religiously inspired and thoroughgoing patri-



archy unusual in world terms. It is true that Middle Easterners, like many others in the greater Mediterranean world, often subscribe to an ethos that makes family honor dependent on the ability of the males to ensure the chastity of kinswomen. It is also true that urban, literate, Muslim norms favor modest dress and even veiling for women, and some Muslim thinkers go so far as to call for secluding them in the house. But the picture is not as uncomplicated as an attention only to the "little tradition" of religious texts and norms might suggest. Deniz Kandiyoti has argued that Middle Eastern patriarchy is a subset of what she calls "Asian patriarchy," and that women's status in modern societies has been much more a function of individual state policy, and of women's ability to organize to influence it, than it has been a result of large, essentialist, civilizational influences such as Islam.<sup>21</sup>

When one has closely examined the myths, it must finally still be recognized that antimodernism has possessed, in world terms, an unusual political and intellectual saliency in the Middle East. But it must finally also be admitted that antimodernism is not always a damning epithet. The conventional journalistic language about Middle Eastern resistance to modernity seems not to acknowledge what the postmodernist movement of the late twentieth century vividly recognized: that the modern has a dark side, much of which could be usefully resisted. Total war, genocide, ultranationalism, class conflict and the impoverishment of some strata, religious fundamentalism, soulless positivism, and colonialism are basic constituents of modernity, not aberrations from a liberal march of progress. For Middle Easterners "modernity" often served as a cloak for European domination; France's armies killing North African villagers and pastoralists were said to be on a "civilizing mission" (*mission civilisatrice*). The expropriated subjects in their colonies might be forgiven for understanding themselves only to be oppressed by the foreigners, rather than having been much civilized by them. Some of the Middle East's antimodernism, then, is utopian rather than merely reactionary, and this point forms one central thesis of the present book.

The nineteenth century saw not the simple encounter of European-led "modernization" with a traditional Middle East but the selective and active appropriation by one dynamic culture of elements from another. (Nineteenth-century modernity was also experienced as alien by many in Europe itself and caused many dislocations there as well). The degree to which Europe was in its turn transformed by the encounter with the Orient has often been hidden in its somewhat nativist historiography, but some of this story has begun to be told.<sup>22</sup> Europe itself departs from any



ideal construct of the modern. Germany, Italy, Spain, and Russia have all had highly ambiguous relationships with democracy, which has in some sense been imposed on them from the outside in the period since 1945. Sweden, Ireland, Great Britain, and Greece have continued to see strong state entanglement with an Established Church. Europe remains highly patriarchal.

Peter Berger, writing of Western Christianity, has seen only three major responses to modernity, those of rejection (fundamentalism or traditionalism), capitulation (liberalism), or a third way he advocates of employing modernity to reconstitute religion on its own fundament. But this simplistic typology, tied so strongly to the theological divide in the contemporary United States, hardly captures the richness of the interplay.<sup>23</sup> We can see the diversity of possible responses to modernity if we examine the modern Muslim world.<sup>24</sup> The reactionary option was, again, very popular in the nineteenth century (and after), with some important section of the Muslim clerics affirming the goodness of absolute monarchy (or at least of authoritarian government), of corporate social hierarchies, and of scholastic knowledge based on the textual authority of the ancients or of scripture against modern canons of critical inquiry. Ironically, this “normal” clerical conservatism of the nineteenth century has been very little studied.<sup>25</sup> It should also be remembered that some Muslim clergy also did play a progressive role, as with Ottoman reforms in the nineteenth century or the Iranian Constitutional Revolution.<sup>26</sup> A different approach, Muslim revivalism, attempted to reinvigorate existing religious institutions such as Sufi orders to resist Western dominance, as with ‘Abdu’l-Qadir in Algeria, or Shamil in the Caucasus, or Ahmad Barelvi in North India, exhibiting, despite their conservatism, social activism and reformism in a way that the reactionary clergy did not.<sup>27</sup>

Another response was millenarianism, as with the Babi movement in the 1840s in Iran, its successor, the Baha’i faith from 1863, and, in a different setting, the Sudanese Mahdi later in the century.<sup>28</sup> Such movements threw up charismatic religious leaders who proclaimed that the end-time had arrived and that therefore great changes in Muslim social customs were necessary and appropriate. Millenarians were quite diverse in their approach to the key features of modernity, some remaining conservative and resembling the revivalists (as with the Sudanese Mahdi), and others becoming something close to modernists themselves (as I will argue happened in the instance of the early Baha’i faith).

Then there is Islamic modernism. Some Muslims, such as the Egyptian Muhammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905), accepted the basic outlines of the mod-



ernist project. He struggled as a young man, during the 'Urabi Revolution of 1882, for the sake of parliamentary governance, and later in life he defended modern practices such as taking interest on loans, allowing greater liberty to women, and the pursuit of modern science and critical thought. Indeed, Leonard Binder has argued that Muslim modernism or liberalism has become the official ideology of the modern Egyptian state.<sup>29</sup> Finally, one sees from the early twentieth century the growth of what has come to be called Muslim fundamentalism, which accepts republicanism and a reformed state bureaucracy, but rejects democracy and free inquiry, and often adopts elements of a command economy.<sup>30</sup>

In this book I employ microhistory in order to help diversify our image of the region. I explore the thought of Mirza Husayn 'Ali Nuri (1817–1892), known as Baha'u'llah ("Glory of God"). An Iranian from the class of high government officials, in 1844 he embraced the chiliastic Babi movement centering on the messianic claims of Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad Shirazi (d. 1850). Exiled from Iran, he became an Ottoman subject in 1853 and spent the next forty years in Baghdad, Rumelia, and Palestine. Acclaimed by his adherents as a Manifestation of God (*mazhar-i ilāhī*) and bearer of divine revelation, he founded the world's youngest significant independent religion, the Baha'i faith. This book examines the responses of Baha'u'llah and his early followers to modernity, which, I will argue, are complex and ambiguous. What were Baha'u'llah's views of the relationship between religion and state? How did this scion of high Iranian courtiers feel about parliamentary democracy? What was his response to the rise of the modern nation-state, the system of industrialized warfare, and the spread of nationalist ideas? How did he feel about the region's changing gender roles and the implications of the Western woman movement for the Middle East? How may the Baha'i faith be categorized with regard to the five religious reactions to modernity just surveyed? How does this narrative enrich our understanding of the multiple and discontinuous responses to modernity in the Middle East? The answers to these questions, I would argue, shed light not only on the genesis of a new religion but on important aspects of Middle Eastern and especially Iranian social and cultural change in the nineteenth century.

The answers are now of even wider relevance. While the Middle East, and particularly Iran, continues to form the site of among the largest Baha'i communities (some three hundred thousand strong before the 1978–1979 Islamic Revolution), the religion Baha'u'llah founded has spread throughout the world and claims about five million adherents in the late 1990s.<sup>31</sup> (This number is probably somewhat exaggerated if one



is counting only persons who consider their primary identity to be Baha'i, which, for example, would exclude many Hindus with Baha'i sympathies in India) It should be stressed, however, that I am here concerned mainly with the earliest three decades of the Baha'i movement, which underwent profound changes later on, in the twentieth century. This book, then, focuses on the intersection of nineteenth-century modernity—of what might be called modernity's first wave—with Iranian society and the *early* Baha'i faith. Although almost all Americans have heard of Imam Ruhu'llah Khomeini and of his authoritarian views on politics and religion, many fewer realize that modern Iran also produced a Baha'u'llah, who preached a rather different set of values. There has been little historical writing about the Baha'i religion.<sup>32</sup> Most of what adherents have written is theological in tone and intent, such that it has an internalist focus and often pays little attention to context. It is my hope that this book can, through the techniques of formal historical scholarship, restore to the saga some of the narratives that have dropped out as it has been told and simplified by generations of believers and other observers.



# *I* • Religious Liberty and Separation of Religion and State

Thomas Jefferson once supported a legal action brought against a corrupt Anglican clergyman who was maintained at the American taxpayers' expense and backed by the authorities in England. The incident led him, as the revolution was brewing in the early 1770s, to read widely in the history of church-state relations and to discover the full depths of the Virginia Anglican establishment's actions against members of dissenting churches such as the Quakers. Quakers, indeed, had been punished even for ritual matters, for example, not accepting baptism. Jefferson thereafter strove to separate church from state and to ensure religious liberty, drafting a Virginia Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom in 1777. Nor was he alone in these sentiments, which were shared even by most evangelical Baptists. Modernity as it developed in North Atlantic societies of the late eighteenth century involved a demand that the state treat all citizens alike in the law and renounce any right to coerce the white male citizen in matters of religion and private conscience. Many believed that these steps were crucial to the development of modern science, as well, since unfettered rational inquiry is difficult to accomplish under a system of religious censorship.<sup>1</sup> These aspects of modernity proved challenging to older conceptions of societal order rooted in the medieval period. Leo XIII, an archconservative pope (1878–1903), strove all his life to prevent Roman Catholic political collaboration with liberals, to see that the whole range of modern ideas was condemned, and to revive the authority of Thomas Aquinas as the bedrock of political and social thought. He proclaimed in his "Libertas Praestan-



tissimum" ("On Human Liberty") of 1888 that "justice therefore forbids, and reason itself forbids, the State to be godless; or to adopt a line of action which would end in godlessness—namely, to treat the various religions (as they call them) alike."<sup>2</sup> Nineteenth-century Catholic authorities insisted that the state had a duty to enforce the one true religion. Most Muslim clerics held a similar view in premodern times, and even in the largely secular Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911 the prominent Shi'ite leader Shaykh Fadlu'llah Nuri demanded the exclusion of non-Shi'ites from the newly established parliament and objected to provisions for freedom of opinion and for equality before the law of non-Muslims.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the modern state has often attempted to establish reason as superior to religion, actively interfering with religious liberty, as in the revolutionary tradition in France or in the Soviet policy of enforced atheism. How did the emergent Baha'i religion confront the issues of religious liberty, the separation of religion and state, and the militant secularism of some modern governments with positivist or scientific ideologies?

Many rulers in medieval and early modern societies of the Greater Mediterranean had attempted to establish a single religion, adherence to which among the subjects was required. The disciplining of subjects' consciences by a religious absolutism was seen by many as a cornerstone of state power. In its most virulent forms this policy led to gory European tragedies such as the Crusades, the expulsions or forced conversions of Jews and Muslims after the Christian reconquest of Spain in 1492, the Inquisition and its Protestant equivalents, and the Wars of Religion (1562–1598). Of course, there were medieval proponents of toleration, such as Nicolas of Cusa, and medieval societies, being less regimented, sometimes allowed for pluralistic situations such as the fair degree of tolerance and communication that was sometimes achieved in Spain between Jews, Christians, and Muslims (though these moments were punctuated with rather darker ones). One result of the Reformation was the introduction of the principle at the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 that the adherence of the prince determined that of his subjects (*Cuius regio, eius religio*), so that potentates who declared for Lutheranism or for Roman Catholicism took their subjects with them, willy-nilly. Refusal of the individual to conform to the state religion resulted, at the least, in heavy sanctions and often in persecution and death. In the sixteenth-century Middle East a similar sentiment led to attacks on Shi'ite Muslims in the Sunni-ruled Ottoman Empire and to the attempt of the Shi'ite Safavid dynasty to wipe out Sunni Islam from Iran. The mixing of state making with religion making had its successes, of course, but these were seldom total. English Catholics, French Huguenots, Ottoman Shi'ites,



and Iranian Sunnis continued to exist, along with a host of other sectarian movements, despite the best efforts of government officials to establish religious monopolies in their territory. The state could never truly dictate the consciences of human beings, succeeding only in imposing a broad umbrella of outward conformity (especially in the cities) and a fear of speaking one's mind that impeded the progress of rational thought and scientific discovery.

Even in late eighteenth-century northern Europe, where some forms of legislated toleration began to be established, active government bias toward those who upheld the state religion, and active discrimination against those seen as dissenters or heretics, was common. Although the beginnings of toleration of Roman Catholics and dissenters (non-Anglican Protestants) in England dates from the aftermath of the 1688 Glorious Revolution (with the decree of 1689), non-Anglicans continued to be barred from high government service and to suffer constraints on their speech. Indeed, the whole idea of toleration, as opposed to liberty, implied a system of first-class citizens who merely tolerated the second-class citizens.<sup>4</sup> John Locke, who wrote on religious tolerance in this period, argued that magistrates had no business interfering with the religious beliefs of individuals or with public worship. He wrote,

Thus if solemn assemblies, observations of festivals, public worship be permitted to any one sort of professors, all these things ought to be permitted to the Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists, Arminians, Quakers, and others, with the same liberty. Nay, if we may openly speak the truth, and as becomes one man to another, neither pagan, nor Mahometan, nor Jew ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth because of his religion.<sup>5</sup>

But Locke denies the rights of churches that taught doctrines undermining the foundation of society, that rejected the principle of toleration, or that required loyalty to a foreign ruler. Ominously, he gives with regard to his last exclusion the example of any Muslims who felt bound to support the Ottoman emperor out of religious loyalty, and in earlier drafts he had explicitly excluded Catholics with foreign sympathies as well.<sup>6</sup> The British tradition of religious tolerance, although subsequently widened, fell short of genuine religious liberty or equal treatment of all religions under the law, and no true separation of religion and state was ever effected. The monarch remained the head of the Anglican church and "defender of the Faith," and Anglicanism continued to enjoy many special privileges. All that England achieved was a broad religious tolerance that increasingly made a place for the dissident sects, Catholics, and even, in the twentieth century, for Asian



religions. But the place made was often grudging and a bias toward the state religion remains palpable to this day.<sup>7</sup> In America Jefferson's bill for establishing religious freedom in Virginia (passed in 1785) and the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution laid the groundwork for a more thoroughgoing religious liberty in that country, though there, too, inequities remained. Eighteenth-century France was extremely intolerant of the Calvinist church, which dwindled to insignificance, and Jews had to pay what was essentially a poll tax. But the Calvinists were finally granted toleration just before the revolution, and after the revolution religious liberty was proclaimed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man. In Russia Catherine the Great adopted Enlightenment ideals with regard to religious toleration, bestowing it on her subjects, including Muslims.

Explaining why the ideal of toleration should have emerged so strongly in the late 1700s in the North Atlantic would take us somewhat far afield from our subject. But several factors may be mentioned. The spread of the printing press in Western Europe from around 1450, and the subsequent increases in literacy (already to around 33 percent in early seventeenth-century England) made religious ideas more easily communicated and enabled unorthodoxy. The burgeoning urban middle classes of the mercantilist age sought more freedoms, but so did dissenting artisans and workers. In England the Civil War and weakness of the state in the mid-seventeenth century allowed religious dissent to flourish. The potential for more powerful bureaucratic states in the early modern period had been thwarted in some instances by religious factionalism, and some reformers thought the state would be strengthened by disentanglement from religion. Genuine concern for individual human dignity also played a significant part for most thinkers of this persuasion. In the thirteen colonies uneasiness about any Anglican monopoly formed part and parcel of the growing resentment more generally toward perceived British authoritarianism among the landed elite, urban workers, and yeomen farmers.

Many of these causes affected modern societies across the board, though not all at the same time. Modernity's imposition of reason as the referee of religious rivalry did not become salient in the Middle East until the mid-nineteenth century. Tellingly, at this time the impact of the printing press was finally being experienced on a large scale, international trade was greatly increasing and the urban middle classes expanding, imported manufactured goods threatened the livelihoods of artisans, peasants began turning to cash crops and engagement with the global market, and the state was developing a bureaucracy based on impersonal, instrumental rationality rather than on mere patronage. Modernity in West Asia met distinctive